1994

"Not a Child to Be Controlled": Autonomy and Dependence in Virginia Gentry Families, 1750-1780

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"NOT A CHILD TO BE CONTROULED": AUTONOMY AND DEPENDENCE IN VIRGINIA GENTRY FAMILIES, 1750-1780

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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by

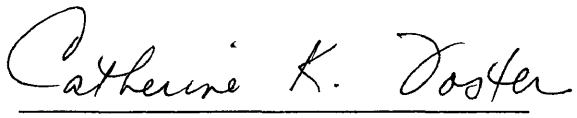
Catherine Kerrison Foster

1994

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts



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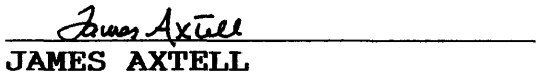
Approved, December 1994



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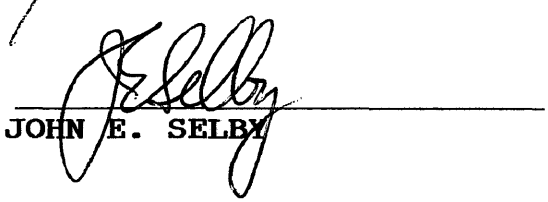

JOHN E. SELBY

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ABSTRACT

Family history has had a burgeoning career on both sides of the Atlantic in the past thirty years. Its study is important because issues of the family both affect and reflect those of society at large. In the eighteenth-century Chesapeake, for example, the rise of the affective family was both agent and product of the general breakdown of patriarchal authority. Daniel Blake Smith's Inside the Great House, Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society argues that this breakdown was the result, in large part, of child-rearing practices that produced independent, self-sufficient adults. The present study of two prominent Virginia families disputes Smith's conclusions.

The evidence does support Smith's observation of the freedoms southern children enjoyed and twentieth-century child psychology studies show that such childhoods can produce autonomous adults, but there is evidence as well that in colonial Virginia, other factors could impede the growth of self-confidence and self-sufficiency. Fear of parental disapproval --and especially the internalization of that disapproval-- could lead not to autonomy, but to psychological and economic dependence. In a century in which the very concept of independence was being wrought, the struggle between Virginia patriarchs and their rebellious yet dependent sons became all the more fraught with meaning.

"NOT A CHILD TO BE CONTROULED": AUTONOMY AND DEPENDENCE IN VIRGINIA GENTRY FAMILIES, 1750-1780

INTRODUCTION

The children of the Virginia gentry lived in an idyllic world. Surrounded by all the amenities eighteenth-century life in the colonies could provide, they grew up unconcerned about their future, confident that their parents' wealth would one day be their own. Their days were punctuated by lessons, visits from neighbors and kin, and formal meals with their parents. In between, the acreage of their fathers' plantations begged for exploration and hours of unsupervised play yielded many delights of discovery. This pastoral setting, so suggestive of harmony and order, belied the conflicts which simmered below the surface in gentry families faced with both the dependence and rebellion of their sons.

Eighteenth-century society, Virginian no less than English, prized harmony and order. The beauty and symmetry of the architecture of Williamsburg, Virginia's elegant little capital, bore witness to this. So too did the rigidly stratified social order, in which everyone knew their divinely ordained place and in which the highest aspiration was to live in that place virtuously and well. The physical landscape of the great plantations, crowned by the Great House and adorned with gardens, fields, and outbuildings, also reflected this preoccupation with order.

Here the patriarch presided over his family: wife, sons, daughters, servants, and slaves. Here, too, the children grew up and learned their place in the social order. In a world that encompassed both freedom and slavery, very young children, black and white, played together with a camaraderie that bore little resemblance to the form their later relationships would take. Older gentry children were schooled to take their places as adults in this society. But how well, in fact, did their youth equip them for the responsibilities they would face as adults? Did the freedom enjoyed by these children, for example, prepare them to become autonomous adults? And how well did gentry children, with their expectations of lavish inheritances, learn to become industrious and self-sufficient - that is to say, *independent*?

These questions beg an examination of childhood and adolescent years in eighteenth-century Virginia. What was it like to be raised in this world that encompassed both pastoral beauty and human degradation? How much contact did children have with their parents and did it vary according to their age? What freedoms did children have, and what restraints? Who, in the network of family, tutors, and nurses, imposed discipline? What expectations did southern colonial parents have of their children? How did those expectations color childhood and how were they reflected in the children's adult relationships with their parents?

Two substantial diaries provide something of a window into the family lives of a pair of prominent Virginians: Robert Carter of Nomini Hall and his uncle, Landon Carter, of Sabine Hall. These diaries reveal both acceptance of the prescribed order and rebellion against it. Some sons and daughters delighted their parents and tutors with their quick minds, their willingness to learn, and their gratitude. Others saddened, confounded, and angered their fathers and parent/child relationships deteriorated into a tug-of-war for independence on the one hand, and filial gratitude on the other. As these diaries hint, quite possibly the freedom of youth was a poor father to independence and the censure of patriarchs a futile animator of filial devotion.

CHAPTER I

"COUNTENANC[ING] INDULGENCE TO CHILDREN": GROWING UP IN THE GREAT HOUSE

The Great House, in which most gentry children lived, was a phenomenon of Virginia's "Golden Age," the fifty years preceding the American Revolution. Built to imitate English country homes, the Great House was the result of the gentry's coming to terms with itself. No longer seeking their fortune in the colonies, only to return "home" to England, the elite now sank permanent roots in Virginia soil. Brick homes replaced the impermanent earthfast post construction that had characterized most seventeenth-century houses of wealthy and poor planter alike.[1]

English influence in the elegant architecture of these homes was unmistakable. The Great House was a conscious attempt to emulate the classic design of the Wren Building of the College of William and Mary and of the Governor's Palace, both in Williamsburg. Virginia governors Francis Nicholson (1690-92, 1698-1702) and Alexander Spotswood

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[1] Warren M. Billings, John E. Selby, Thad W. Tate, Colonial Virginia: A History (White Plains: KTO Press, 1986), 199-230; Mechal Sobel, The World They Made Together (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987).

(1710-1722) brought the classicism of Christopher Wren and Andrea Palladio to the provincial capital and began the transformation of the colony from the cultural backwater it had been.

Native-born gentry were not about to be outdone by the Scotsman Spotswood in the magnificence of their country seats. One by one, great plantation homes were built along Virginia's rivers. Strategically situated on a rise, shielded by stately trees, the great house slowly, grandly revealed itself to visitors approaching by water. They could not be unaware of the power structure of the plantation, as the great house rode "supreme above tiered ranks of dependencies leading down to a waterfront and river."[2] The hierarchical nature of Virginia society was reflected in the physical arrangement of the plantations. The great house stood at the pinnacle and there was no question from where or whom authority emanated.

In some instances, the approach by land was no less impressive. Philip Vickers Fithian arrived at Nomini Hall, the Westmoreland County plantation belonging to Robert Carter, in October 1773 to begin his work as tutor to Carter's children. Leaving the main road, Fithian proceeded through an avenue of poplar trees towards the east face of the great house. It was not as impressive an entrance as

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[2]Rhys Isaac, Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982), 39.

the south side, but "through [the trees], the House appears most romantic, at the same time it does truly elegant." Fithian noted that because of its situation on high ground, it could be seen from a "considerable distance." He himself had seen it six miles away.

The house was built of brick, but had been covered with lime and was stark white. Seventy-six feet long from east to west, and forty-four feet wide, it had five chimneys. The south side, the front of the house, boasted a porch supported by three pillars. The north side Fithian thought the most beautiful of all; the upper story had seven windows ("each with eighteen lights"), the lower six, and in the middle a large portico, flanked by windows. The opulence of the home impressed Fithian, who counted a total of 549 "lights." A grassy terrace about five feet high with a slope of eight feet led to the front doors and one approached them via broad steps of the same height and slope. The whole "appear[ed] exceedingly well" to people approaching the Carter family seat.

At equal distances from each corner of the house stood brick outbuildings, described by Fithian as "considerable." One was the school house, another a stable, another the coach house and the last a work house.[3] Just west of the

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[3]Hunter Dickinson Farish, ed., Journal & Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian, 1773-1774: A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg, Incorporated, 1945), 107-09. All quotations from primary sources will retain the spelling, capitalization,

great house, neatly arranged to form a "little handsome Street," stood smaller buildings: the bake house, dairy, storehouse, and others. Rectangular walks, "paved with Brick, & covered over with burnt Oyster-Shells" allowed patriarch, family, and guests to stroll in the cool of the evening, enjoying the vistas of rolling hills, orchards, river and agreeably situated buildings. Fithian recorded the sense of satisfaction these prospects prompted:

> "We stroll'd down the Pasture quite to the River, admiring ... the River, Hills, Huts on the Summits, low Bottoms, Trees of various Kinds, and Sizes, Cattle & Sheep feeding some near us, & others at a great distance on the green sides of the Hills, People, some fishing, others working, & others in the Pasture among the Horses;-The Country emphatically in her goodly Variety!"[4]

Even the slave quarters were seen in this bucolic light. Looking through clusters of savin trees, Fithian could see a "little Farm House, or Quarter for Negroes; these airy Situations seem to be the Habitations of Health, and Vigor."[5]

Nomini Hall was set upon two thousand acres of land in the fork between the Potomac and Nomini Rivers. The pastures, orchards, and rivers beckoned to young explorers; the workings of mill, kitchen, and stable captured their

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punctuation, and grammar of the original. Any additions of the author's will appear in brackets [ ].

[4]Ibid., 233-34.

[5]Ibid.

interest; young black children, too young to labor, provided companionship. Free to wander about, the children of the great house met those of the slave quarters. The sharing of cultures began in early childhood with the exchange of games, stories, and superstitions.[6] The planter's child understood, probably before adolescence, his station as the black child's owner. But no such social distinctions applied, or even mattered, as the very young spent their early years in joint discovery of their world.

Robert Carter's plantation was not atypical. Great houses lined the banks of the rivers that formed Virginia's irregular shoreline. John Harrower, a Scottish indentured servant, was hired by Colonel William Daingerfield to tutor his children. Harrower's diary described the location of Daingerfield's seat, Belvidera, on the Rappahannock River seven miles from Fredericksburg. The school house stood at the "upper end of an Avenue of Planting at 500 yds. from the Main house," high enough above the river that Harrower could "stand in the door and pitch a stone on board of any ship or Boat going up or coming doun the river."[7]

The household consisted of the colonel and his wife, four children, a housekeeper, and the newly arrived tutor. Harrower had difficulty estimating the number of

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[6]Sobel, World They Made Together, 96-97.

[7]Edward Miles Riley, ed., The Journal of John Harrower, An Indentured Servant in the Colony of Virginia, 1773-1776 (Williamsburg : Colonial Williamsburg, 1963), 41.

Daingerfield's slaves: "how many blacks young and old the Lord only knows for I belive there is about thirty that works every day in the field besides the servants about the house; such as Gardner, livery men and pages, Cooks, washer & dresser, sewster and waiting girle."[8] Housing for thirty or more slaves, outbuildings, school house, and the great house created the same self-contained village setting that Carter's plantation presented.

Gentry children on these plantations were part of a complex network of immediate family members, kin, tutors, servants, and slaves; indeed, many patriarchs referred to the entire network as their "family."[9] Tutors shared disciplinary responsibilities with parents; grandparents intervened in the raising of grandchildren. Children's relationships with blacks on the plantation were especially complex. Black wet-nurses suckled white babies; black nannies looked after very young children; white children played with blacks too young to offer productive labor to their masters; white children witnessed whippings of slaves and learned early the structure of power in their world; young white males were not above sexual encounters with female slaves. The experience of white children with blacks ranged from complete dependence to complete

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[8]Ibid., 56.

[9]See the diaries and correspondence of William Byrd and Colonel Landon Carter, for example.

domination. The experience was not necessarily linear, nor were adults ever truly free of their dependence on blacks, psychologically or economically.

How did this extended family groom children for adulthood? Twentieth-century exploration of the place of the child in the family provides a framework for understanding the function of the family from the child's perspective. While two centuries separate the children of each era, these studies show the development of a child's sense of self and of his sense of virtue, and how these are attained within the family unit. The family of colonial gentry children was much more extensive than the nuclear family of today, but the family serves children of all centuries in essentially the same way: all look to their family for a sense of identity and purpose.

First, the family provides the child with a sense of identity. The child realizes as she grows that she shares with her parents basic qualities, ranging from name to language to anatomical and psychological similarities. The young child sees her parent as stronger, more powerful, and more competent than herself, and tries to win her parents' affections by imitating those qualities. She conforms to the parental model to acquire those desirable characteristics both to make herself more lovable and to become more strong, powerful and competent.[10]

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[10]Jerome Kagan, "The Child in the Family," Daedelus 106 (Winter-Spring 1977): 35.

The child also looks to the family for protection and as a focal point of attachment. The child in distress will look to particular people who can comfort him; twentieth-century studies have shown that parents are preferred in this situation, even when the child spends a great deal of time with another caregiver. These studies also suggest that the child can expect fewer and more predictable constraints upon his behavior from a caregiver other than his parents. Emotionally involved parents, watching for deviations from their own norms in their children's behavior and sometimes threatened by them, can respond in different ways to the same behavior. Unless the child can recognize consistency in his parents' responses to his behavior, he will be uncertain of what to expect in his dealings with them.[11] The sketchy information available about child-rearing in eighteenth-century Virginia suggests this was an important factor in some children's upbringing.[12]

Lastly, the child develops her sense of virtue -- her values -- from her family. She learns what behavior is acceptable, and learns to evaluate her own in light of what her culture (i.e., her family) sets as a standard. She also develops a sense of her own virtue, a sense of her value to the family. The child views her parents as extraordinarily

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[11]Ibid., 37.

[12]See, for example, the letter from Robert Bladen Carter to his father, Robert Carter, and discussion, page 30 below.

wise individuals; their acceptance or rejection of her indicates her worth to them. The important consideration here is how the child perceives the actions of her parents, not necessarily the actions themselves.[13] The conflicts between fathers and sons of the Virginia gentry may well have their roots in this point; fathers certain that they have fulfilled their duty toward their sons by providing for their futures clash with sons apparently intent upon the dissolution of their inheritances. The fathers' behavior appeared loving but the sons perceived a lack of respect for their individual capabilities.

There is some dispute regarding when childhood was recognized in Western culture as a separate period of development and when the rise of the affective family occurred. In his Centuries of Childhood, Philippe Ariès proffered the idea that childhood was not recognized until the seventeenth century. Before that time children were viewed as little adults, without the special needs recognized today.[14] By the end of the seventeenth century,

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[13]Kagan, "The Child in the Family," 40-42.

[14]Philippe Ariès, Centuries of Childhood, A Social History of Family Life, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), Part I. For discussions of the status of family history, particularly in the American context, see: John Demos, Past, Present and Personal, The Family and the Life Course in American History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Peter Charles Hoffer, Colonial Women and Domesticity, Selected Articles on Gender in Early America (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988); Joseph E. Illick, "Child-Rearing in Seventeenth-Century England and America," in Lloyd deMause, ed., The History of Childhood (New York: The Psychohistory Press, 1974); and Laurel

however, the loving relationship between parent and child was more commonly recognized. The emphasis on the child's value to the family was focused less upon his economic contribution and more upon his ability to enhance the family's prestige, by excelling in academics for example. In this way, children became more reliant upon their parents' approbation for their sense of self-worth.[15] The medieval child, whose worth could be measured by his labor on the family farm, literally could see the contribution of his work to the family unit and was free from the torment that struck some Virginia gentry sons. In this sense the debate regarding the beginning of the rise of the affective family is almost irrelevant, for the important point is not the strong emotional attachment the parent felt for the child, but that the "child's perception of the favor in which he is held can exert a profound influence on his present and future state."[16]

An examination of the household of Robert Carter of Nomini Hall illustrates some of the ways in which twentieth-century child psychology studies can be applied to

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Thatcher Ulrich, "The Family History of Early America," in Patricia J.F. Rosof and William Zeisel, eds., Family History (New York: Haworth Press, 1985).

[15]Kagan, "The Child in the Family," 42-43.

[16]Ibid., 44.

eighteenth-century subjects. When Fithian arrived, the Carters had nine children, seven of whom were his students. Seventeen-year-old Benjamin was bright, studious, inquisitive, quiet, and very fond of horses. Robert Bladen (Bob) was fourteen, quick to anger but easily mollified. Although Fithian described him as clumsy and slovenly, the tutor did not find him as bereft of ability as a previous tutor had. Bob's natural restlessness, however, made it "almost wholly impossible to fix him for any time to the same thing."[17] Priscilla, thirteen, had a quick mind that delighted her tutor. She had a sweet disposition, danced and played keyed instruments well, and was distinguished by her abstention from swearing (an apparently popular method of self-expression in eighteenth-century Virginia).[18] Anne (Nancy) was eleven and mercurial in temperament, given to powerful enmities and to equally powerful friendships. Her disposition did not abet her performance in the schoolroom, being neither "diligent nor attentive to her business."[19] Frances (Fanny), nine, was the "Flower of the Family," a beauty who resembled her mother; her charm and very presence drew attention, her sweetness of face corresponding to her faultless personality. Betsy, eight, was "young, quiet and

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[17]Farish, ed., Fithian's Journal, 64.

[18]Not surprisingly, the sober Presbyterian seminarian highly approved of the lady-like Priscilla.

[19]Ibid., 65.

obedient," (outshone, perhaps, by Fanny?). Five-year-old Harriot was "bold, fearless, noisy and lawless; always merry, almost never displeased."[20] Harriot had discovered the pleasures of music and was already able to play some tunes on the flute and harpsichord. Fithian's observation that she "never wearied with the sound of Music either vocal or Instrumental" conjures the image of an exuberant five-year-old, perpetually singing (perhaps the same songs), to the exasperation of her older siblings.[21]

Ben and Bob, together with their cousin Harry, lived in the schoolhouse with Fithian, although Ben slept in the great house when he was ill and also during his father's absences, when he became "head of the house."[22] The girls lived in the great house and walked the one hundred yards to the schoolhouse each morning. Probably this arrangement was intended to foster protection for the girls and autonomy for the boys. Certainly it afforded the girls more informal contact with their parents than their brothers had. And it

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[20]Ibid., 66.

[21]The descriptions of the children's personalities are based on Fithian's, found in pages 64-66 of his diary. The information about their ages is based on the research of Louis Morton, Robert Carter of Nomini Hall (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg, Incorporated, 1941), 220. The Carters had two other children. John Tasker was eighteen months old at the time of Fithian's arrival, and was mentioned in the diary only three times, upon occasion of his illnesses. Sarah, a baby of six months, was never mentioned in the diary.

[22]Ibid., 157, 238.

gave the boys more freedom: Fithian noticed Bob missing from his room one night at midnight. Bob not only failed the next morning to account satisfactorily for his absence, but he was caught in several lies as well.[23] Fithian gave him a "severe correction," probably just verbal, but beyond that Bob suffered no consequences for his truancy. His behavior probably would not have been met quite so leniently by the patriarch of the great house.

The children's daily lives were loosely structured. A typical school day began a little after 7:00 a.m., broke for breakfast when the bell summoned them to the great house, resumed from 9:30 a.m. until noon, and reconvened at 3:30 p.m. for an hour and a half. The "typical" day was usually interrupted, however; students were excused for dancing and music lessons (given by instructors other than Fithian) and for company visits. Lessons were suspended altogether for holidays and for dances at neighboring plantations (a practice Fithian noted with some annoyance).[24]

The diary provides some insight into the interaction of parents and children in the Carter family. One historian has noted very little contact between the Carters and their

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[23]Ibid., 160.

[24]Ibid., 118. On April 1, 1774 he wrote, "Good Fryday-A general Holiday here-Wednesday and thursday I gave up my School on account of the Dance, and they must have this Day for Devotion!"

children, not even once per week.[25] Fithian made regular entries in his diary, yet his emphasis each day differed; he recorded his impressions of southern life and of the people he met. His was not the methodical record-keeping of each event of the day (as was William Byrd's diary, for example) so probably it is not the best source from which to draw statistical conclusions. An examination of the contexts of contact, however, between parents and children may yield a truer understanding of their relationships.

Fithian's description of the great house included mention of a separate children's dining room. Not all the children dined there; Ben, Bob, and Priscilla took their meals with their parents. But this arrangement did not preclude contact at these times between parents and the younger children. There are hints in the diary that the younger children were permitted to join their parents at the more informal morning meal. Fithian's description of the children's daily schedule included the notation that "at half after eight the Bell rings for Breakfast, we then repair to the Dining-Room."[26] It is possible that the children thus began their days in the company of their parents, although the younger ones were relegated to the

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[25]See Michael Zuckerman, "Penmanship Exercises for Saucy Sons: Some Thoughts on the Colonial Southern Family," South Carolina Historical Magazine Vol 84 (1983): 152-166. Zuckerman notes that the children saw their parents far less than once a week.

[26]Ibid., 41.

children's dining room for the formal midday meal. Holidays appear to have been an exception to this rule; on Christmas Day 1773, even five-year-old Harriot was permitted to join the adults.[27]

The younger children were permitted to join their parents and older siblings after the formal meals. One night after supper, for example, Carter called Nancy in to play her guitar for him (he had been giving her lessons because the music master could not play the guitar). "In She minces slow & silent from her supper," and, after several stalling maneuvers, she began to play. Carter listened, then, studying her face, asked her incredulously, "What, pray Miss Nancy, what bewitched you with a desire of clipping your Eye-Brows-The Genius of Woman shines forth in this little Girlish trick." No reply was recorded, the subject was dropped, and the conversation then moved to Nancy's progress with her lessons.[28]

There are indications, however, that Carter was withdrawing from family life during this time. It was not unusual for him to miss supper: "While we supped Mr. Carter as he often does played on the Forte-Piano. He almost never

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[27]Ibid., 54.

[28]Farish, ed., Fithian's Journal, 174. The day after Nancy's "girlish trick" was discovered, Fithian noted that nine-year-old Fanny was allowed to sit down to breakfast. Perhaps her behavior was approved more than her older sister's, and thus rewarded.

sups."[29] He kept to his room rather than join his family for Christmas dinner, ostensibly because he had breakfasted late. Fithian described him as "much given to retirement & Study."[30]

It is likely that Mrs. Carter, "prudent, always cheerful, never without Something pleasant, a remarkable Economist, perfectly acquainted...with the good-management of Children,"[31] stepped in fill in the void her husband's abdication created. Her cheerful temperament and interesting conversation (Fithian found her surprisingly wellread) provided some respite for all members of the household from Carter's uncommunicative manner. She frequently visited friends, took evening walks, and dined in the company of her children. She was distracted by Ben's frequent illnesses, so much so that Ben attempted to hide them from her to spare her "great anxiety."[32] Disapproving though he was of Virginian ways of parenting, Fithian found nothing to criticize in Mrs. Carter's mothering.

But Carter's withdrawal was not total. He shared his passion for music with his children, especially with Priscilla and Nancy. He taught Nancy to play the guitar and spent many musical afternoons and evenings with Priscilla.

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[29]Ibid., 54.

[30]Ibid., 64.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Ibid., 161.

Carter specifically set aside Tuesdays and Thursdays for practice. Fithian noted several evenings spent enjoying family concerts; one was conducted although "the *Carter* who goes with the Team is ill of the sore Throat!"[33]

Daily evening walks through the garden were a family custom. Fithian's description of the "Company of noisy, gay, & agreeable young girls" indicates that these were not formal meetings of parents with children, but a time of relaxation and fun.[34]

Carter also enjoyed riding with his children. He, Priscilla, and Nancy would ride for exercise or to visit friends. Shortly after Christmas 1773, Fithian noted that Carter and Priscilla took a ride together and planned another for the following day, indicating that the interpretation of infrequent contact between Carter and his children may be incorrect.

There is no mention of contact, however, between Carter and his much younger children. This silence in Fithian's record leads to the speculation that there was, in fact, very little. The young children lived in the great house with their parents. Although there is ample evidence of Mrs. Carter's very great fondness for her children, there is no direct evidence of how she cared for her toddler, John,

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[33]Ibid., 86.

[34]Ibid., 154. It does not appear that Carter joined his family for these evening strolls; Fithian's habitual listing of his walking companions never includes Carter himself.

and her infant, Sarah. Fithian was thunderstruck one evening when a supper conversation revealed a common gentry practice of having their infants nursed by black wetnurses.[35] Although English medical literature had recommended the natural mother's milk since at least 1612, in practice the elite commonly used the services of wetnurses.[36] Arguments about the relative advantages of mother and wetnurse, and about when nursing should actually begin, continued through the eighteenth century.[37] It is possible that Mrs. Carter's decision to employ wetnurses stemmed therefore, not from a lack of love for her infants, but from cultural norms. Clearly she employed nurses for her children. The excitement generated by the visit of Mrs. Oakly, a former nanny to the children, indicates that the children formed strong attachments to their nurses, probably as a result of a great deal of time spent in their care.[38]

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[35]Ibid., 52.

[36]Hired nurses were common in France as well; indeed, nursing a child was considered debilitating to the mother's health. David Hunt, Parents and Children in History: The Psychology of Family Life in Early Modern France (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1970), 102-108.

[37]Marylynn Salmon, "Definitions of Motherhood in Early America: Evidence from the Medical Literature." Lois Green Carr: The Chesapeake and Beyond--A Celebration (Crownsville, Md.: Maryland Historical and Cultural Publications, 1992), 163-167.

[38]Farish, ed., Fithian's Journal, 173. Fithian noted that Mrs. Oakly "has acted as nurse for several of Mrs. Carters Children with great credit-All the family speak of her with Love & regard...I gave all the Girls this day to chat with their old acquaintance." Ibid.

In contrast to the affectionate mother, the quiet father who valued taciturnity[39] may well have been a forbidding figure for his young children. Certainly the threat of paternal discipline was sufficient to check even the recalcitrant Bob's behavior - for a time. One of Fithian's responsibilities as tutor was that of disciplinarian. Some historians have speculated that gentry parents relegated this duty to tutors, enabling parents to enjoy a pleasant, loving relationship with their offspring.[40] It is clear, however, that while Fithian was expected to control the children, he was not the sole disciplinarian. Fithian contrasted the Carters with other Virginians of their rank who "seem to countenance indulgence to children." The Carters, however, "have a manner of instructing and dealing with children far superiour, I may say it with confidence, to any I have ever seen, in any place, or in any family. They keep them in perfect subjection to themselves, and never pass over an occasion of reproof."[41]

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[39]Ibid., see page 50 for Carter's comments regarding what he thought "pleasing and agreeable" in a person.

[40]Daniel Blake Smith, Inside the Great House, Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 108; Philip Greven, The Protestant Temperament, Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 278.

[41]Farish, ed., Fithian's Journal, 34-35.

Several instances of parental "reproof" appear in the diary. Once when Bob struck Nancy, Fithian intervened with "sharp admonitions for better Behaviour," but shortly afterwards received a message from Carter directing him to "correct Bob severely," whereupon Fithian whipped him. Carter himself administered a flogging upon the hapless Bob who, in a serious breach of etiquette, had kept himself home from a dance for lack of shoes without giving the host "seasonable Notice."[42] On another occasion, Fithian resorted to threatening to send Bob to his father's study every day, after three corrections and reasoning with him "concerning the impropriety of his Behaviour" failed to produce the desired effect.[43] The threat worked. More than a month passed before Fithian recorded any further incidents of "correction."

That Fithian was responsible for disciplining the children was recognized by other members of the household. The housekeeper reported an instance of Bob's use of bad language with the expectation that Fithian would punish him. Fithian himself felt this responsibility keenly: "my Duty seems to require my Presence [at home] pretty constantly; & I am forced to produce an Example for what I find it necessary to enforce on our Boys." The result of his tutelage was the carriage of his charges in society; should

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[42]Ibid., 205.

[43]Ibid., 86.

they hurt themselves or scandalize their family, he would have a "large share of blame, perhaps more than the parents, or even the Boys themselves." His relief is evident, then, when on a hot July day he wrote, "We are rid of two *troubles* from this morning [Friday] till Monday: for *Bob & Nancy* are gone to the Dancing School-They Dance at Colonel Lee's-Two great troubles, indeed, for [in] this hot weather I can hardly keep them in the Room, much less to any useful business."[44]

While the Carters' active involvement in child-rearing may have been atypical of Virginia gentry, their expectations of their children were not. The children's education, for example, was designed to prepare them for their gender-assigned roles in eighteenth-century society. Although sons and daughters were educated together, their curricula differed. Boys were taught mathematics and expected to read in the classics, in addition to a core curriculum of reading and writing. Girls were taught reading, writing, dancing, needlework, and music. The expectation was that boys would manage the lands they would inherit from their fathers, and that girls would become sufficiently accomplished to marry well and to be both ornaments and helpmeets to their husbands.

The Carter children followed this pattern. The boys were taught mathematics and Latin. Carter himself

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[44]Ibid., 170, 218, 187.

supervised the girls' efforts in music. The cultivation of manners was no less important in this society; we have seen that Carter whipped Bob for his deficiency in this regard. Fithian was impressed with the children's manners with the servants: "I blush for many of my acquaintances when I say that the children are more kind and complaisant to the servants who constantly attend them than we are to our superiors in age and condition."[45]

The children were being groomed for their futures, but essentially their futures were being provided for them. Nomini Hall in Westmoreland County was the largest of Carter's land holdings which were scattered about the Northern Neck and the backcountry, in Loudon, Richmond, Fairfax, and Frederick counties.[46] Generally, the oldest son could expect to inherit the main plantation and younger sons an outlying one. In addition to the formal education Carter provided for his sons, he also began to groom Ben to manage Nomini Hall. One December day, he sent Ben to his head overseer to "account the measuring of the Crop of Corn," the yield of the previous summer's planting.[47] Ben accompanied his father on a day's expedition to check the progress of some storehouses Carter was having built,[48] and

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[45]Ibid., 35.

[46]Morton, Robert Carter, 62-66.

[47]Farish, ed., Fithian's Journal, 49.

[48]Ibid., 189-91.

on another to check a mill under repair.[49]

It is possible that the mature patriarch and Ben were of similar temperament and that this facilitated their relationship.[50] Both were quiet, studious, and responsible individuals. Ben was "desirous of acquiring Knowledge, docile, vastly inquisitive & curious in mercantile and mechanical Matters."[51] Carter himself could not have selected any better traits for his heir's character. It is not difficult to imagine the pride with which Ben would have borne himself as he learned how to maintain the property that one day would be his, or the father's as he accompanied him. Ben was fortunate that his expectations and his father's coincided. Ben was a "youth of genius,"[52] esteemed by his teacher and parents alike. He lived up to his parents' expectations and therefore enjoyed a convivial relationship with them. His tragedy was his frail health, perhaps consumption, that led to his early death in May 1779 at age twenty-two.

Similarly, Priscilla seems to have enjoyed her father's approbation as she fulfilled his expectations of her. Her quick mind was a delight to her tutor and her father spent

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[49]Ibid., 225.

[50]See discussion below, page 29, regarding the elder Carter's character as a youth.

[51]Farish, ed., Fithian's Journal, 64.

[52]Ibid.

many hours practicing music with her and giving family concerts. Her reward was the leisure time spent with her father on horseback riding expeditions; she seems to have been the preferred child in this respect.

Bob, however, was a disappointment to his father, who did not mince any words in saying so. Writing to the Reverend James Madison at William and Mary College, Carter said of his son that he "has neither Genius nor application so that if he acquires a knowledge of English words, construction & practical Arithmetic in the course of two Years I shall be forever obliged to you."[53] Clearly the father had no high hopes for his son, then nineteen, and Bob responded by living up to *that* expectation.

There are several possible explanations for the tug-of-war between father and son for attention, love, and respect. Bob may have keenly felt the interest invested in his older brother, and resented his brother's position as favored son. His troublesome behavior was a way to express his anger and to draw his parents' attention to himself. He appeared to be successful at both; Fithian's diary is peppered with references to Bob's bad language and physical fighting and to his tutor's and father's disciplinary measures.[54]

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[53]Robert Carter Letter Book, Vol. III (1775-1780), February 16, 1778. Typescript copy, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library from Manuscript Division, Duke University Library.

[54]Although Bob was disciplined frequently for his fighting, there is a suggestion that fighting could be socially acceptable: Ben had explained to Fithian that fighting was the best way for "two persons who have any dispute to go out

Whether his behavior provided a sufficient vent for his frustrations is an entirely different question, and his later life suggests that it did not.

It is also possible that Carter recognized in his son some undesirable qualities of character that he had struggled to suppress within himself. A provocative psychological profile of Robert Carter has suggested that, in his youth, Carter was remarkably similar in temperament to his second son.[55] At age twenty-one, just at the time one would normally be expected to take on the responsibilities of running a plantation, Carter left for an extended stay in England and ran up considerable debts.[56] Very little is known of Carter's early years, so it is impossible to state categorically that his trip to England, clearly not intended for educational purposes, was in fact a flight from responsibility. If it was, however, it explains his recognition of that same tendency in Bob and his efforts to control it.

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in good-humour & fight manfully, & says they will be sooner and longer friends than to brood and harbor malice." Farish, ed., Fithian, 39.

[55]Shomer S. Zwelling, "Robert Carter's Journey: From Colonial Patriarch to New Nation Mystic," American Quarterly 127 (October 1975): 613-36.

[56] Some inkling of Carter's London stay is given in a letter written to Samuel Athawes in 1764, in which Carter admits that "my gratifications exceeded my yearly income." Ibid., 614.

In 1780, after Bob had completed two years at William and Mary, Carter turned the management of Billingsgate plantation in Richmond County over to him. The estate consisted of about 1,200 acres and forty slaves, and Bob was to keep the profits from both crops and livestock. Less than three years later, mired in debt from his drinking and gambling habits, he was forced to sell it to satisfy creditors. He fled to London where his father's agents refused to extend him any credit and returned to Virginia in disgrace in 1786. Trembling, he approached his father for help: "This morning I waited on you in Your Library with an intention of asking you for some employment; It has and ever will be the case I am afraid, when before you; in my serious reflections, I have observed a stoppage in my Throat and intellect vastly confused: What it proceeds from God only knows-It is my wish if you should choose to be imployed by you. Every exertion of body and mind will I exert in your behalf."[57] Carter asked for, and apparently received, a firm resolution to do better, for he placed the management of another plantation in Bob's hands. In 1791, however, Bob was back in London, where he died a somewhat mysterious death two years later.[58]

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[57]Letter, dated June 9, 1786, quoted in Morton, Robert Carter, 225.

[58]Morton, Robert Carter, 226.

The lives of the Carter children indicate that they looked to their family (parents, tutor, nurse) for a sense of their own identity and for love and protection. Their parents provided the education necessary for them to function successfully in their society and their mother particularly, by temperament and design, provided warmth and love.

All of the children, except Bob, were able to conform to the model presented by their parents, without necessarily sacrificing their own uniqueness. Priscilla acquiesced to the standards set by her parents and seemed to be a favored child in return. Yet when her father refused to allow her to marry his clerk, Robert Mitchell, she remained firm, and eventually married him four years later.[59] There is no indication that her perseverance in her decision marred her relationship with her father. Similarly, Fanny, the sweet "Flower of the Family," made plain her desire that a suitor "desist in making any further advances to her." Her wishes were honored, and at age seventeen she married a man of her own choosing.[60] It is interesting to speculate on the relationship between the taciturn Carter and the irrepressible Harriot. Fithian's diary yields only one clue: Carter named a yacht after his merry, fearless little

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[59]Zwelling, "Robert Carter's Journey," 624.

[60]Robert Carter Letter Book, 1775-1780, Part 2, p. 168, quoted in Morton, Robert Carter, 228.

daughter.[61] Perhaps she was able to reach something inside him that no one else, even his ever-cheerful wife, could. Unquestionably life was easier for children who accepted the standards offered by their family.

But Bob's life, marred by a volatile relationship with his father, was not easy. His pitiable letter to his father upon his return from London indicates the level of uncertainty with which he approached his parent. It is difficult to determine whether Ben's hesitancy stemmed from a lack of consistency in his father's dealings with him. Fithian's diary covers only one year and so offers a limited perspective, but Carter's disciplining of Bob appears to be remarkably uniform during that period. Yet the son saw something in the father that encouraged him to appeal to Carter even after his Billingsgate and London debacles; perhaps Carter had moments in which he relented.

Carter undoubtedly thought he had done all he could to provide for his children and in so doing had discharged his obligations as a parent. But did his dutifulness indicate love to his children? Was it enough to give children dependent upon parental signals a sense of their worth? Before Fithian's arrival, another tutor had described Bob as "destitute of capacity"[62] and Carter apparently agreed with this assessment. Relying upon his father's signals

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[61]Farish, ed., Fithian's Journal, 38.

[62]Ibid., 64.

regarding his value, Bob spent his short lifetime alternately trying to prove his father wrong and, to both their minds, proving him right. Did he ever know that his father had written of him: "My son Robin...shews [evidence of weakness of character?] touching the depravity of mankind, which state is truly pitiable"?[63] Did he ever have a chance to be different when the most important figure in his life, upon whom he relied in developing his own sense of self-worth, thought him "destitute of capacity"?

The experience of Robert Bladen Carter casts some doubt on the argument that the relative freedom of southern gentry childhood encouraged autonomy in the child's adult years.[64] Fithian noted how exceptional the well-mannered Carter children were among other gentry children, but he also noted instances of leniency in their upbringing: their propensity for holidays -indeed, they considered them a right - and the danger of pressing his students to industriousness lest they consider him "unfeeling and cruel."[65] He also noted how they scattered during their afternoon breaks to the many recreations offered by plantation life: fishing, riding, visiting friends. "Bob, every day at twelve o-Clock, is

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[63]Carter Letterbook, Vol. III, dated December 5, 1778, p. 37. Typescript in Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library.

[64]See especially, Smith, Inside the Great House and Greven, Protestant Temperament.

[65]Farish, ed., Fithian's Journal, 218.

down by the River Side with his Gun after Ducks, Gulls &c.- Ben is on his horse a Riding, Harry, is either in the Kitchen, or at the Blacksmiths, or Carpenters Shop. They all find places of Rendesvous so soon as the Bell rings, and all seem to choose different Sports!"[66] Harry's interests took him to the workplaces of slaves, where he would have both learned from them and enjoyed their deference. The three-hour break was unsupervised, and the children could spend the time as they chose.

In this sense, they were typical products of what one historian calls the "genteel" mode of child-rearing. The genteel mode was characterized by an intense love of children combined with an awareness of decorum and distance. Children regarded their parents with awe and respect. Discipline was imposed by tutors, nurses, and servants, although there was never any sense of the will being purposely thwarted, broken, or denied; indeed, child-rearing patterns were marked by unrestrained indulgence. Boundless play characterized the first six or seven years of life and the independence of those first few years, it is argued, resulted in a sense of "self-worth, self-love, self-confidence, ... and a sense of inner security,"[67] in a word, autonomy.

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[66]Ibid., 49.

[67]Greven, Protestant Temperament, 265-74.

"Children grew up in independent households," writes one historian, "where they were taught to make autonomous choices, and above all, to become self-sufficient."[68] The Carter children grew up in a household typical of a genteel family, although their parents were less indulgent than most. Yet it is difficult to argue that gentry sons, raised to expect rich inheritances, were taught, "above all, to become self-sufficient." The Southern genteel pattern of child-rearing may, in fact, have bred dependence, both financial and psychological, a result abhorred by many fathers. The families' fortunes were already made, the challenges already met. All that remained for the sons was to maintain the family fortune. Some sons, receiving parental signals that they were not even capable of that much, responded by dissipating their inheritance in rebellion.

If it is true that the freedom accorded gentry children in their very early years could lead to self-confident, autonomous adults, then there must be another explanation for the failure of some of these children to realize that autonomy. The work of Erik Erikson on the "eight stages of man" provides a model for the different levels of development from infancy to old age, and perhaps provides some insight into the problems of gentry sons.[69] Each of

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[68]Smith, Inside the Great House, 230.

[69]Erik H. Erikson, Childhood and Society (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1950). For further reading on

Erikson's psychological stages has a corresponding social institution; for example, stage one is the crisis of trust versus mistrust in infancy, and the corresponding social institution is religion, which preserves trust and hope. The answer to the question of the self-sufficiency of gentry sons may lie in stage four: the final stage of childhood in which the crisis faced is industry versus inferiority.

This stage in the life cycle occurs during the child's school years, before adolescence, at approximately six to twelve years of age. In this stage the child learns to

> become an eager and absorbed unit of a productive situation...supersed[ing] the whims and wishes of his autonomous organism. His ego boundaries include his tools and skills: the work principle teaches him the pleasure of work completion by steady attention and persevering diligence. *His danger, at this stage, lies in a sense of inadequacy and inferiority*. If he despairs of his tools and skills or of his status among his tool partners, his ego boundaries suffer, and he abandons hope for the ability to identify early with others who apply themselves to the same general section of the tool world....The child despairs of his equipment in the tool world and in anatomy, and *considers himself doomed to mediocrity or mutilation.*[70]

The emerging virtue of this stage is competence, "that personal quality institutionalized as technology." In a literate society, the technology to be mastered was reading

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Erikson's work, see J. Eugene Wright, Jr., Erikson: Identity and Religion (New York: The Seabury Press, 1982), especially 37-69.

[70]Erikson, Childhood and Society, 227. Italics mine.

and writing. On a plantation, mathematical, managerial, and agricultural skills also had to be learned. The strength of the child's ego is dependent upon his competence in these basic skills.[71] The child who views himself as incompetent, for whatever reason, is doomed to mediocrity or to "mutilation." Whether he does so because of familial relationships or social norms, the result is the same. The child grows into an adult who believes himself incapable of meeting cultural standards and embarks on a course of self-mutilation.

Fithian did not consider Robert Bladen Carter "destitute of capacity," yet Bob rebelled in his youth, was unwilling to apply himself to his studies, and wasted his inheritance. He thought himself incompetent, bereft of the tools to prove himself to his father. He trusted his father's estimation of his worth and spent his life in fruitless pursuit of something he could never name. He never understood why he observed a "Stoppage in his throat and intellect vastly confused" whenever he entered his father's presence and he died alone in London, several days after being involved in a drunken brawl.

If Bob enjoyed a great deal of freedom as a child, he did not as an adult. He was unable to free himself from financial dependence upon his father, nor was he ever free of the desire to please him. He believed his father's low

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[71]Wright, Erikson, 68.

estimation of his abilities and, with Ben's death, he became his father's heir. There was no need for him to work towards self-sufficiency; it would be his upon his father's death. It is difficult to say which of these two factors had the greater impact on his life. Yet it is clear that the southern genteel mode of child-rearing did not always yield autonomous adults. Parental disapproval and cultural norms and expectations counteracted the benefits of childhood freedoms in the development of self-confident and independent children.

CHAPTER II

"NOT A CHILD TO BE CONTROULED": THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

One deviation from the rule does not an argument make, but Bob Carter was hardly an exception. Other examples of rebellious gentry sons can be found in the family of Landon Carter (1710-1778) of Sabine Hall in Richmond County. Carter owned an estate of over thirty-five thousand acres in the Northern Neck alone by 1750, the result of a generous inheritance from his father, Robert "King" Carter, and three advantageous marriages. He built his magnificent home in Richmond County in typical fashion, situating it high up on a hill overlooking the Rappahannock River.[72]

Landon Carter had seven children, Robert Wormeley, Landon, John, and Elizabeth, by his first wife, Elizabeth Wormeley (d. 1740), Maria, by his second wife, Maria Byrd (d. 1744), and Judith and Lucy by his third wife, Elizabeth Beale (d. mid- 1750s).[73] He kept a voluminous diary in which he wrote on subjects ranging from farming to politics

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[72]Jack P. Greene, ed., The Diary of Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752-1778 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1965), 4-6.

[73]Ibid.

and in which he spilt considerable ink on his family life. Unlike Fithian's description of Frances Carter's parenting, there is nothing in Landon Carter's diary that sheds any light on his wives' mothering of their children, but a few passages suggest what Carter thought a good mother should be. A mother should place her children's welfare above her own, he believed. He condemned Robert Wormeley's wife, Winifred, who continued to nurse her newborn while ill, "and this because she should not breed too fast. Poor children! Are you to be sacrificed for a parent's pleasure? I have been a Parent and I thought it [nursing while ill] murder and therefore hired nurses or put them out."[74] One wonders if this practice was decided unilaterally or if Carter's wives had a voice in the decision.

Expressions of maternal tenderness were also desirable in Carter's view, not only for the children's sake, but for the sake of the parents' relationship. Speaking of an acquaintance's second wife who ignored the two children from his first marriage, Carter observed, "had she really a proper affection...certainly no woman willing to oblige her husband would...have missed so fine an opportunity as the taking notice of one of these little ones must have been to engage her husband's affections."[75] Upon hearing of the death of the wife of a friend, Carter noted that the man

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[74]Ibid., 511, Oct. 14, 1770.

[75]Ibid., 416, May 25, 1770.

must marry again, "for as he has many girls he will see how constantly they must want the tender and instructive care of their natural mother."[76] Clearly, Carter did not think that the care of young children ought to be solely the province of nurses. Mothers were to provide affection and warmth and to sacrifice their own needs to their children's; possibly he had observed these qualities in his wives.

Carter's third wife died in the mid-1750s, leaving behind two young daughters. In 1757, Carter complained of "having none but negroes to tend my children nor can I get anyone."[77] Slaves did not provide proper discipline; they allowed the children to eat as much of whatever they wanted, Carter fretted, "let[ting] them press their appetites as their own children did and thus they are constantly sick."[78] In later years, he would complain of his children's arrogance and ingratitude, but he never made the connection to this period in their lives when they were not under his care and direct supervision.

Carter considered paternal responsibilities different from maternal ones. He provided a home and education for

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[76]Ibid., 352, Feb. 6, 1770.

[77]Ibid., 194, Dec. 13, 1757. In another instance of a father bemoaning the influence of blacks upon his children, William Byrd I sent his daughter to England for her education in 1685 because "she could learne nothing good here in a great family of Negroes." Quoted in Julia Cherry Spruill, Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies (New York: W. W. Norton & Comapny, Inc., 1938), 187.

[78]Ibid.

his children, supervised their medical care when they were ill, disciplined them, and provided an example for them to follow. In return, he demanded their respect and attention, and was deeply wounded when he failed to receive his due from his offspring. Convinced of man's basic weakness and corruption, Carter held himself aloof from family and friends, hoping to insulate himself from imperfect men. Driven, perhaps, by a need to emerge from his illustrious father's shadow, he pursued virtue and honor and fully expected his children to follow suit.[79] Their failure to do so was incomprehensible to him and his disappointment in them, especially in sons Robert Wormeley and John, is palpable in the pages of his diary.

Robert Wormeley managed two of Carter's plantations, Hickory Thicket and Landsdowne, both in Richmond County,[80] yet lived at Sabine Hall. His father repeatedly bemoaned Robert's love of gaming, his lack of responsibility for his wife and children, and his total lack of respect for his father. Breaking a resolution made to his father not to gamble again, Robert lost the proceeds he received for his tobacco crop, as well as some lottery prize money "which would have paid off every debt that he owed." (Adding insult to injury, part of the lottery winnings Robert lost was Carter's.) In a classic understatement, Carter continued,

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[79]Ibid., 10-14.

[80]Ibid., 132, 826.

"I am unhappy in these my children," (referring to son, John, as well) and resolved "I must [k]now [that] what I am to leave under guardianship or to their wives and children will all be ruined."[81]

Carter's observations of his eldest son were often laced with sarcasm. "I cannot help taking notice of my young Squire, my son and grateful heir apparent. He knew it was beginning to be a sickly time, and that his own wife was in a bad way after her miscarriage; and yet he went off on Wednesday under pretence to go to eat Sheep's heads at Corotoman. But I see it was to game in Farnham that day, and to John Wormeley's race on Thursday, where I do suppose he was to game."[82] Robert, he complained, "never thinks of family or anything else when he stakes his all at the gaming table."[83]

Worse than Robert's gambling sins was his criticism of his father's management of his properties. While Carter's accomplishments would dazzle any of his peers, Robert remained not only unimpressed, but critical:

> I cannot help taking notice that the long time I have lived, the care I have taken of my family, the paying off Children's fortunes, and putting out 3 sons with an Estate very well to pass in the world, still maintaining a large family at home,

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[81]Ibid., 640-41, Nov. 16, 1771.

[82]Ibid., 630, Sept. 15, 1771. Corotoman had been Robert "King" Carter's family seat.

[83]Ibid., 677, May 8, 1772.

> and all this without being in debt but a very trifle, I say, I cannot help taking notice that these circumstances well considered as they ought to be in a country almost universally enthralled do not preserve to my with my [sic] Son the character even of a tollerable manager. Every thing that I do must be excessively wrong...It is really grievous to hear any accidental bad prospect which will happen almost in any year imputed solely to my bad management."[84]

Carter had provided for his children and had the benefit of years of experience, and so could not abide having his judgment questioned. That Robert, who was thirty-six and managed two plantations of his own, should question his father's management was tantamount to betrayal. Carter was perplexed, defensive, and hurt as Robert "would always be contradicting his father which is his constant opprobrium to his filial duty."[85]

Neither would father and son ever agree on the question of discipline, and Robert Wormeley had a powerful ally in the person of his wife, Winifred. She was a perpetual thorn in Carter's side; her obstinate will matched his and the sparks flew when they met. In an oft-quoted passage, Carter describes a "domestic gust" in which he took a whip to his grandson, Landon, then nine. Carter had been unable to tolerate the child's impertinence to his parents, and when little Landon further ignored Carter's instruction to come to breakfast, Carter hit him twice with a whip. "Madame

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[84]Ibid., 447-48, July 19, 1770.

[85]Ibid., 735, Sept. 29, 1772.

then rose like a bedlamite that her child should be struck with a whip and up came her Knight Errant to his father with some heavy God damning's, but he prudently did not touch me. Otherwise my whip handle should have settled him if I could...I see in her all the ill treatment my son gives and has given me ever since his marriage...a girl Violent, Sulkey, Proud, imperious."[86]

Several years later, Carter observed how Winifred's failure to discipline her children had deleterious results, "I too constantly see the obstinacy of this Lady in her eldest son and daughter; The first she entirely has ruined by storming at me whenever I would have corrected him a child; and the other has already got to be as sawsy a Minx as ever sat at my table."[87]

Carter tried to rectify what he saw as the shortcomings of his grandson's upbringing. Observing that Landon had a "fine Genius ruined by a bad example at home"[88] and that he could not behave with "common decency" to anyone, Carter "made it my business to talk to this Grandson and namesake, and set before him the unhappiness he must throw everybody into as well as himself...he pretended to be affraid that I wanted to scold at him. I told him no, it was my concern that made me earnest to advise him to imploy his good sence

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[86]Ibid., 310, June 27, 1766.

[87]Ibid., 646, Jan. 15, 1772.

[88]Ibid., 765, Aug. 29, 1773.

which god had blessed him with, and not to sacrifice that to a temper which must in the end make him miserable." Carter concluded the interview, satisfied that "at last he seemed to listen, and indeed shed tears at what I said."[89]

A series of penmanship exercises a tutor composed for Carolina planter John Harleston's sons in the 1760s suggests that Carter may not have been alone in that age in his expectations that he could set his grandson straight in a single lecture. The exercises the boys copied were fictitious letters, supposedly addressed to young men like themselves, that tried to undo years of indulgence and leniency in a few lectures on morality. One letter, for example, reputedly from an older brother to a younger, complained of the "youth's dissolute carriage and warn[ed] him that his debts would no longer be paid by his elders."[90] The form of the letters implied that the recipients might well have been hearing these moral directives for the first time in their lives, and, more, that having at last heard the advice, they would reform.

In drawing up the penmanship exercises, the tutor assumed the role of surrogate father, filling in the void created by parental neglect or death. Aware that "what we learn in our younger years sinks in to the memory, adheres to us till old age, and has a prevailing influence over all

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[89]Ibid., 578, June 16, 1771.

[90]Zuckerman, "Penmanship Exercises," 153.

our conduct,"[91] the tutor sought to counter the liberties of the boys' early years. He seemed unaware, however, that at age eighteen the boy was well past his "younger years."

Observers of southern children noted that their upbringing seemed soft, pampered, and indulgent, suggesting parental indifference rather than a conscious fear of stunting the child's development. By the time parents asserted their dominance, demanding obedience and dutifulness, it was too late and sons rebelled. The irony is that these same sons would repeat the pattern of their upbringing, finding it more convenient to indulge their children and "in the end simply summon up the energy for that one ritual lecture or letter fifteen years too late."[92]

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[91]Bluff Plantation Book 1760-1773, penmanship exercises, unpaginated, quoted in Zuckerman, "Penmanship Exercises," 154.

[92]Ibid., 156. Two examples from Robert Wormeley Carter's diary illustrate this point. Servants, rather than parents, appear to have been the primary caregivers for his children; the very threat of having servants taken away was enough for Robert to decide to continue living at Sabine Hall: "I understood from [Landon Carter] that he would take away the maids that tended my Children & that he would not aid me but distress me; this prevailing reason obliged me to lay aside my design [moving to Hickory Thicket]...being compelled to live with him who told me I was his daily curse." Robert Wormeley Carter Diary, Typescript Manuscript No. 8, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library, August 25, 1766. Having entrusted his son's upbringing to servants, he later followed the pattern of indulgence. When a friend offered a goodly price for one of Robert Wormeley's horses, he declined it: "I should have taken his offer as [the horse] is 9 yrs old next may; but my Son shewing a desire to have him, I indulged him." Ibid., March 22, 1777.

Landon Carter left a clue that this had been his method of child-rearing as well, despite his railing against undisciplined children. After complaining about enduring "really as much abuse [from his son] as could be submitted to a few days ago," Carter related that Robert was "obliged to beg me for a pair Pumps to go to Colo. Tayloe's in and like an old fool I have given him a pair of my own."[93] It is not likely that Carter responded any differently to Robert Wormeley when his son was a child.

John was also a frequent subject of Carter's complaints. John maintained a household of his own; Carter recorded a financial transaction in which John paid for the labor of one of his father's slaves to do some brick work at his house. Carter also recorded other business transactions with his son in which John agreed to provide flour or supplies to make clothing, and did so promptly.[94] Nonetheless, John's gambling practices condemned him in his father's eyes: "Mr. John Carter not yet returned. A gentleman of vast business in the gaming way. These Gent[s: Robert and John] have both wives very big with large gangs of children and yet they play away and play it all away."[95] On another occasion, he noted receiving a letter from son Landon, "the most affectionate and dutiful that could

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[93]Greene, ed., Diary of Landon Carter, 907, Dec. 30, 1774.

[94]Ibid., 295-96, 458, 523, 528.

[95]Ibid., 830, July 16, 1774.

possibly be." The tenor of the entry changes drastically with the next sentence: "At the same time one from John Carter, the mere hero among the brutes if not an Agent of Hell, the most insulting, and false accusing letter that ever father had from a Son." In his letter, John had dared to question some of the terms of his father's will; Carter swore he would "answer his letter in my Will."[96]

Carter frequently responded to the fractious behavior of his sons and grandsons with threats, usually confided to his diary, to alter his will. In one entry, he complained at length of his sons' failed resolutions to abstain from gambling, concluding, "let their resolutions be what they will to tell nothing, I always hear of winning; and this I don't [faded] of. I must alter my will."[97]

On at least one occasion, Carter made the threat verbally, but with no effect. "My rascally grandson has now got to whipping his sister, Pretending through play...I forbid him and ordered him out of the school, but he does not care to stir. I told him he would not go on. He had done enough to set my resolution to give him nothing; he said he did not care, he could work. I asked him for the least disposition to do any one thing but lounge and Idle about; he never has shewed it."[98] It is conceivable that

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[96]Ibid., 1122, Aug. 8, 1777.

[97]Ibid., 522, Nov.8, 1770.

[98]Ibid., 780-81, Sept. 27, 1773.

Carter, frequently storming against his sons and grandsons, threatened them with exclusion from his will often enough for them to ignore him. They were probably correct to call his bluff: Robert inherited the Sabine Hall estate.[99]

Carter's daughters were not immune to his wrath. His daughter Judith married Reuben Beale, the "only monster," according to Carter, "who ever injured [him] in his life." Carter ignored his daughter when he saw her at church and refused to listen to Reuben's pleas that the "way to forgive an injury is to forget it," responding that "the only way for a much injured human Creature to forget the Person who injured him is never to see him."[100]

A more poignant attempt at reconciliation occurred between father and daughter about a month later. Judy had written for permission to visit her father about a week after her husband's attempt to talk to her father; it was granted on the condition that she come alone.[101] She

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[99]Ibid., 130 n.

[100]Ibid., 807, May 8, 1774. Carter was still nursing a grievance for an insult he suffered at Beale's hand at least two years earlier. In March 1772 Carter noted the visit of Captain Beale (Reuben's father), the first "since the monster Reubin's quarrel." Ibid., 656, March 1, 1772. Despite his many references to the quarrel, Carter never elaborated upon its cause in his diary, but daughter Judith's decision to marry Reuben in spite of their enmity rankled for the rest of his life. Only four months before his death on December 22, 1778, he lamented that "this child [Judith] chose to go out of the world from her father." Ibid., 1146, August 28, 1778.

[101]Ibid., 810-11, June 16, 1774.

arrived ten days later, her father determined "not to let nature discover its weakness on seeing her; I was only happy in that I could burst into tears; a poor miserable girl, I could not speak to her for some time."[102] Before leaving in mid-July, Judy went up to her father's chamber to say good-bye. He informed her that he had taken steps to ensure that any financial assistance he gave her would not fall under her husband's control, and then inquired if she was yet pregnant. She replied that she was sure she was not, whereupon Carter told her, "that she might be glad of the Circumstance; for as to his Stamen I was certain a person descended from so goutified a stock must be very bad...and a child by such a man must only be a constant additional Concern." His insensitivity to her pain, torn as she was between father and husband, clearly left Judith unable to speak: "To this, she made no reply but kissed me and took leave of me."[103]

Robert was less restrained in his responses to his father. In August 1766, he had resolved to avoid all arguments with his parent, to refrain from finding fault with Carter's management of the plantation, and to attend quietly to domestic affairs, in hopes "that things will alter."[104] That he failed in his resolution is clear from

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[102]Ibid., 815, June 25, 1774.

[103]Ibid., 830, July 15, 1774.

[104]Robert Wormeley Carter Diary, August 25, 1766.

the pages of his father's diary; Robert disagreed with Carter no matter whether the subject was agriculture or discipline. On one occasion, Carter attempted to disrupt the card-playing entertainment Robert was providing for his friends. Robert, now forty, told his father "he was not a child to be controuled."[105] Carter's reply that "40 ought to hear reasons" evinced his belief that reason offered the best hope in the endless struggle of imperfect human beings for improvement. Robert's rejection of that life ethic was not to be endured; yet Carter insisted on foisting his value system upon his son.

But there was more at stake for Carter in his struggles with his son than his values. He saw Robert's reckless behavior as a rejection of himself. Carter often spoke of the child's obligation of obedience to the parent, as Scripture prescribed,[106] but he revealed, whether consciously or otherwise, more pragmatic reasoning. Referring to Robert, he wrote, "I have one monster who will not be controuled by me, though he sees every moment that his all must come from me."[107] Of his grandson, Landon, he commented, "If a grandson had the grace to know his grandfather from whom his all must come he would when that

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[105]Greene, ed., Diary of Landon Carter, 1002, March 15, 1776.

[106]See for example, the entry on October 6, 1774, p. 866-67.

[107]Ibid., 907, Dec. 30, 1774.

Grandfather in extreme age and great infermity was alone [and] attended with vast Pain[,] have now and then endeavoured to have entertained him by his Company."[108]

Carter never lost an opportunity to remind his offspring of their filial duty to him and their dependence upon him. Robert "acknowledge[d] that he could not live anywhere else and yet no gratitude inclines him to think of a better treatment to his father."[109] Robert's position as an adult with a family of his own, yet wholly dependent upon his father, was untenable. He knew he could live nowhere else. He could not even entertain his friends without being subject to parental disapproval in front of them. He understood his father's desire to control his behavior perhaps better than Carter, who couched his recriminations in Biblical terms, did. Robert's gaming and his reckless disregard of his family's fortune were outlets for his frustration with his lack of power and purpose. Never having anything to work for, knowing (his father's threats notwithstanding) that his future was provided for, he simply

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[108]Ibid., 866-67, Oct. 6, 1774.

[109]Ibid., 983, Feb. 16, 1776. Ten years earlier, Robert had noted in his own diary a failed attempt to remove his family from Sabine Hall to Hickory Thicket "to avoid the frequent quarrels" between him and his father . But receiving some "hints, that Father looks upon it in so heinous a light as to threaten to make an alteration in his will to the prejudice of me & my Children," Robert spoke to his father about it. Robert remained at Sabine Hall when Carter threatened to take away his children's nursemaids. Robert Wormeley Carter Diary, August 25, 1766, p.32.

had no incentive to live his life any differently. And pleasing his father was patently impossible.

Carter gave his children all he did out of a sense of duty. Robert did not perceive love in his father's actions, but saw instead Carter's desire to control his family. If he could not earn their obedience through devotion, he would wrest it from them through coercion. Under these circumstances, Robert had little chance of developing a sense of self-worth when he was daily reminded of his dependence upon his father.

Landon Carter's children may well have experienced considerable freedom while very young; his reference to their care by blacks indicates that he was not deeply engaged in their upbringing at that point. But any tendencies to self-sufficiency that such freedom may have engendered were extinguished by social norms and by a father whose demands of his children could never be satisfied.

CONCLUSION

Only two families have been studied here, and it is clear that the patriarchs were somewhat exceptional. But both Carter families were typical of eighteenth-century Virginia gentry in a number of ways. The physical setting was typical. They lived on huge plantations which afforded children considerably more freedom than children living in nuclear families in towns or small farm settings more typical of the north would have known. The Carter family setting was also typical of Virginia gentry. The nature of the extended plantation "family" also allowed more freedom, as parents left the care of their children to servants and, as Fithian's diary shows, when reports of some of the boys' infractions were lost between schoolhouse and great house.

Likewise, the cultural norms of the Carters were typical. The children were educated according to gender; visits with neighbors and kin were frequent; standards of civility and genteel behavior were rigorously enforced, especially as children became adolescents. It is possible that the pattern of discipline the South Carolina Harleston boys' writing exercises suggested, obtained among eighteenth-century Virginia gentry as well. Fithian's comments about his responsibility for his charges' future actions and Landon Carter's efforts with his grandson support this conclusion.

The overriding cultural norm, however, was society's expectation that parents would give their children the resources necessary for establishing their livelihoods as adults. Providing for the material comfort of their children was, for fathers, the accepted way of showing love in an age that emphasized restraint and moderation, harmony and order.[110]

In return, children reciprocated with their gratitude, manifested in their obedience and devotion to their parents. In this Lockean theory, parent/child relations were contractual: parents prepared their children for their emergence into the world and children responded with a devotion that never diminished in spite of their independence from their parents.[111] Parents taught by example rather than by precept, and the deterioration of parental authority into parental tyranny was grounds for nullifying the contract. For their part, children were not to give in to the sin of filial pride, a headstrong defiance and disobedience of parental wisdom and wishes. The

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[110]Jan Lewis, The Pursuits of Happiness, Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 25, 28.

[111]Jay Fliegelman, Prodigals and Pilgrims, The American Revolution against patriarchal authority, 1750-1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), chapter 1, "Educational Theory and Moral Independence," 9-35. John Locke's Some Thoughts Concerning Education was well-read and enthusiastically received in the colonies: it was reprinted nineteen times before 1761. Ibid., 4.

punishment for such a sin in the novels of the day was grim: death, alone and unreconciled to heartbroken parents.[112]

A proper education was the remedy John Locke prescribed to prevent such disastrous scenarios. The corrupt world held untold dangers from which parents needed to protect their innocent children. But how was an innocent to learn enough of the ways of the world to resist their seductions and remain uncorrupted? This was the dilemma of the transition from childhood to adulthood; for Locke, the solution was education. By molding a child's thinking and teaching him how to resist the evil influences of the world, parents prepared, as one historian put it, for both the "moral independence of the child and the development of his rational self-sufficiency."[113] The attainment of these virtues marked the child's transformation from adolescent to adult. Then, propped up by his moral and rational independence, the adult could make his way through the world, immune to its temptations.[114]

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[112] Ibid., 28-29. Clarissa, heroine of Samuel Richardson's novel of the same name, dies alone after having fled her father's home, choosing her lover over her duty to marry her father's choice for her.

[113] Ibid., 22.

[114] Not coincidentally, this brief discussion of Lockean pedagogy has referred exclusively to males. For women, Fliegelman noted, "a felicitous marriage served . . . the function that education did for a man. It protected her from corruption and ensured personal happiness." Ibid., 126.

Landon Carter's abhorrence of worldly evils is manifest in his paroxysms over his sons' gambling, drinking, and general indolence. It is more than likely that he was familiar with Locke's Some Thoughts concerning Education; it is plain that he concurred with Locke's thinking.[115] Carter's sons had yet to emerge from adolescence, as their behavior clearly convinced him - Robert's assertion that he was not a child to be controlled, notwithstanding. The elder Carter had provided his sons with both education and livings, yet neither of them were morally independent or self-sufficient in his eyes.

Indeed, growing up with the expectation of a comfortable inheritance encouraged not autonomy but dependence. The families in this study cast doubt upon Daniel Blake Smith's conclusions that the genteel mode of child rearing produced self-sufficient adults and that "inheritance in the Chesapeake was much more of a liberating force."[116] Certainly neither Bob nor Robert Wormeley Carter

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[115] The popularity of Lockes' Education (see note 113) suggests that Carter could have read it, although a reconstruction of his library shows that he owned only Locke's An Essay on Human Understanding. Carol Edith Curtis, "The Library of Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1710-1778" (M.A. thesis, Department of History, College of William and Mary, 1981), 32. But evidence in the *Virginia Gazette* in the form of advertisements requesting that borrowed books be returned, suggests that planters' reading was not confined strictly to books they owned. Richard Beale Davis, Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585-1763, 3 vols. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1978), 624.

[116] Smith, Inside the Great House, 243.

found his situation "liberating." These sons grew up in their fathers' shadows, their fortunes already made. They perceived no reason for industry and, bereft of purpose, they had little sense of their own value. They fought this hopelessness by squandering their inheritances, declaring in this way their independence of their fathers. In fact, they became more mired in dependence upon their fathers, and with each act of rebellion, the cycle of dependence, frustration, and rebellion continued.

Southern gentry families have typically been portrayed as patriarchal. But it is possible that the facade of plantation, family, and social life actually hid an anarchy of sorts. Children left to their own devices for years instinctively rebelled when parents belatedly tried to restrain them. Southern parents like Frances Carter loved their children, but that love did not necessarily translate into close supervision and discipline; there is enough in Fithian's records to show that the Carter children did in fact enjoy a great deal of liberty.

The model of the highly structured authoritarian, patriarchal family did not apply to all gentry families. Instead, the gentry families studied here were "anarchistic," in spite of the best efforts of the fathers. The anarchistic family has few rules and gives little attention to boundaries of behavior. In its flawed version, this family becomes totally chaotic and the struggle of individual members to reestablish control could lead to a

shift (or an attempted shift) toward an authoritarian model.[117] When one looks at the records of the fathers, their stern warnings and blustering threats, it is tempting to categorize southern gentry families as authoritarian. But the experiences of the sons and daughters raise questions about this characterization. With few rules and boundaries imposed on children, a struggle was bound to ensue as fathers attempted to reestablish control over their offspring.

Landon Carter's complaint that "even children [who are] just [beginning to] cloath[e themselves] are instructing their Parents," was a common parental impression of this struggle, although there is some indication that his own child-rearing practices were coming back to haunt him. He continued, "and what is worse those Parents [his children] who practiced this when Children themselves, know not how to curb their Children now they attempt it."[118] Children were given many freedoms early in their lives, and attempts at discipline when they reached adolescence appear to have been too little too late. The benefits of being free to make their own choices and to develop self-reliance appear, in some cases, to be completely stifled by a combination of parental disapproval and social norms that fostered

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[117]Lynn Hoffman, Foundations of Family Therapy, A Conceptual Framework for Systems Change (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1981), 89-99.

[118]Greene, ed., Diary of Landon Carter, 907, Dec. 30, 1774.

financial dependence.

Jay Fliegelman observed that "The great challenge of eighteenth-century politics, familial and national, was to make authority and liberty compatible."[119] Landon Carter and his sons never found a compatible common ground; for Carter, Robert Wormeley and John were perpetual adolescents; for his sons, particularly for Robert who lived under the same roof, Carter's refusal to admit the boys' adulthood was galling and intolerable. In the rapidly changing world of the eighteenth century, their conflict was a mirror image of that between Britain and her colonies: the younger demanding recognition of their passage to adulthood while the elder resisted.[120] The colonists viewed British repression of their liberties in much the same way Robert Wormeley did his father's, resenting parental demands of gratitude and obedience.

Twentieth-century psychology suggests that children who grow up in a nurturing environment where self-assertion is encouraged tend to grow into self-sufficient autonomous adults. But it is important to study Virginia gentry family relationships, not only in the context of twentieth-century psychology, but also in the context of the eighteenth-century world in which they existed. The experiences of the Carter families show that the expectations of their society,

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[119]Fliegelman, Prodigals and Pilgrims, 14.

[120]Ibid., *passim*.

together with the fathers' disapproval of the sons, combined to encourage not autonomy but dependence. In their lives, authority and liberty forever remained unreconciled.

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